



# Washington State Department of Agriculture News Release

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WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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## **Gypsy moths beware! State Department of Agriculture is looking for you**

OLYMPIA – The annual effort to determine if one of America's most destructive pest insects is active in Washington state is underway. Between now and early July approximately 21,000 cardboard gypsy moth traps will be placed throughout the state by 43 seasonal employees from the Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA).

The colorful orange or green A-frame traps are 7x4x4 inches in size. Traps will be checked every two weeks between July and September to determine if any moths have been caught. If moths are caught, more traps will be placed in the area to try and pinpoint the center of the infestation.

The gypsy moth is one of America's most destructive, unwelcome pest insects. The moth causes millions of dollars of environmental and economic damage in the eastern U.S. each spring by eating the leaves from more than 500 different species of trees and shrubs.

The gypsy moth is permanently established in 18 states in the U.S. The goal of the Department of Agriculture's program is to keep the moth from becoming established in Washington. Since the moth was first detected in Washington in 1974, every infestation that has been detected has been eradicated.

Traps are normally placed one per square mile. More traps are placed along ports and waterways and areas where gypsy moth activity has occurred in the past.

The Port of Grays Harbor, eight ports on Puget Sound, and three on the Columbia will be heavily trapped to determine if any gypsy moths arrived in recent months on foreign ships docking at those ports. The eight ports on Puget Sound include Port Angeles, Port Townsend, Bellingham, Anacortes, Everett, Seattle, Tacoma and Olympia. The Columbia River ports include Kalama, Longview, and Vancouver.

### **Background of the gypsy moth**

The gypsy moth has a wingspan of about one and a half inches. The female moth is white with brown markings. The male, which is slightly smaller, is tan with brown markings.

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The gypsy moth was brought to the U.S. from Europe over 100 years ago. It got loose through accident and quickly established residency in Massachusetts. It has proved extremely resistant to eradication efforts and has spread to 18 states and the District of Columbia despite being the subject of more eradication and control strategies than any forest insect in U.S. history.

There are two kinds of gypsy moths, the European variety and the Asian variety. The Asian variety is a much greater threat to Washington state than the European variety because it eats evergreen as well as deciduous trees and its female can fly. The latter means that Asian infestations can spread much more quickly and further and are also much more difficult to pinpoint.

#### **Trapping in the local area**

The male moth is drawn to the trap by a very effective female scent lure. Once inside the trap, it gets stuck on a very sticky, adhesive substance.

Depending on the number and location of moths caught, and other evidence of gypsy moth activity in the area, some sites may be treated next spring to eliminate an infestation.

Twenty-nine acres in Vader were treated for the European gypsy moth this spring with the biological insecticide *Btk* (*Bacillus Thuringiensis* var. *kurstaki*). In neighboring Oregon, 160 acres were treated for the European gypsy moth with *Btk* in Ashland, near the California border, and 910 acres were treated for the Asian gypsy moth in Portland.

The traps will be removed from the field in September.

#### **Damage from major infestations**

Individuals who have personally experienced major gypsy moth infestations in the east don't want to see the gypsy moth in Washington state. "I lived through two major gypsy moth infestations near Hartford, Conn., when I was a kid," Sammamish resident Andy Rosenberg said. "The worst part was during this time of year.

"The trees looked like midwinter, with their leaves all gone. When the caterpillars were eating, you could hear them crunching, and their droppings were a steady patter of sound that turned into a thick slimy mess when it rained."

For information on the summer trapping program, call the Gypsy Moth Hotline toll-free at (800) 443-6684.

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